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SIPDIS

AID FOR DCHA/FFP LANDIS, CRUMBLY, MUTAMBA,  
PETERSEN  
DCHA/OFDA FOR PRATT, BARTON, KHANDAGLE,  
MENGHETTI, BORNS, MARX, HALMRAST-SANCHEZ  
AFR/SA FOR FLEURET, LOKEN, COPSON, MACNAIRN  
EGAT FOR HOBGOOD, THOMPSON  
STATE/AF FOR RAYNOR  
PRETORIA FOR DISKIN, HALE, SINK, REYNOLDS  
ROME FOR FODAG FOR LAVELLE, DAVIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [US](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE CANCELS CRITICALLY  
NEEDED CROP AND FOOD SUPPLY ASSESSMENT MISSION WITHOUT  
EXPLANATION.

Refs: (a) Harare 00569 (b) Harare 00646

[1](#)1. Summary. Less than a week after it started, the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) canceled the World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) long-awaited crop and food supply assessment mission (CFSAM), which was expected to provide the most authoritative estimates to date of the country's grain harvest. The GOZ orally informed the UN Agencies of the cancellation and has yet to confirm it in writing, although the UN has requested written confirmation several times. The GOZ has provided neither an explanation nor justification for its decision. Speculation abounds amongst donors as to the reason. The implications for this action are far reaching, both in terms of the lack of credible data on which any potential food appeal can be based, and in terms of prospects for GOZ-donor coordination of humanitarian assistance. End summary.

[1](#)2. Despite initial rumors that the GOZ would not allow the CFSAM, the GOZ requested in writing in late March that the UN agencies conduct the assessment. In fact, a number of donors congratulated the GOZ on its decision to move forward with the CFSAM at a UN sponsored meeting on March 31st between the donors and the GOZ (see Reftel A). Donors noted to Minister of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare, Paul Mangwana, who represented the GOZ at this meeting, that the CFSAM would, hopefully, reveal authoritative data on the country's harvest, based on which donors would be able to begin initial planning regarding possible support for food and other humanitarian assistance. With the cancellation of the CFSAM, all major donors agree that it is difficult, at best, to justify the need for continued food assistance.

[1](#)3. WFP/FAO started field work on the CFSAM on Saturday, May 1, 2004, almost two weeks after UN agencies and the GOZ began field work on a vulnerability assessment (which just concluded). The day before the CFSAM field work was scheduled to begin, however, the Ministry of Agriculture refused to let donors participate as observers, contrary to long-standing practice in Zimbabwe and other countries. The GOZ proffered no real explanation for this decision. Several days after UN agencies and donors complained about the decision to exclude donor officials as observers on the CFSAM, the GOZ announced the cancellation of the assessment.

[1](#)4. The GOZ continues to maintain publicly, and in private meetings with UN officials, that the grain harvest will be sufficient to meet the country's needs - approximately 1.8 million metric tons. If the harvest is less than projected, the GOZ insists that it will import grain to fill any gap from its own resources. Most donors believe that the GOZ's harvest projections are wildly inflated and that the GOZ has significant financial constraints that would impair its ability to import substantial amounts of grain. [Note: European Unions (EU) officials in country assert that the GOZ has obtained a US\$60 million line of credit backed by tobacco futures, with which it has already contracted to import approximately 210,000 metric tons of grain. End Note.] In addition to the domestic harvest and imports, the GOZ's existing grain stockpile will be an important factor to consider. At this point, however, the GOZ has still refused to offer any information to confirm the reported 200-300,000 metric tons of grain in its silos or plans for distribution. Most donors believe that the GOZ has been releasing stocks from the silos of its Grain Marketing Board, in

anticipation of the upcoming harvest and imports. This belief is consistent with the relatively good availability of maize on the open market. EU officials speculate that current stocks may only be as high as 50-60,000 metric tons.

15. Speculation varies amongst donors as to the reasons for the GOZ's latest obstinacy. Some believe that the 4 days of research the CFSAM had concluded thus far was indicating a significantly lower harvest than the GOZ's public pronouncements. Faced with potential embarrassment, the GOZ decided to cancel the assessment mission. Post believes this explanation is unlikely. The GOZ's harvest projections have been way off the mark for several years running and the risk of embarrassment has never seemed to be motivating factor for the GOZ. The more likely explanation is that this current action is part of the GOZ's electioneering strategy. With the scheduled March 2005 Parliamentary elections approaching, the GOZ has an interest in controlling the vast majority of food stocks. For the same reasons, the GOZ would be reluctant to have substantial numbers of international and NGO staff in the field who would be positioned to observe its election tactics. This analysis is consistent with increasing reports of NGO harassment in rural areas.

16. Comment: Whatever the reasons for the GOZ's decision, it signals to donors that the GOZ is uninterested in cooperation with the international community on humanitarian assistance, even to assess the state of the country's crop. Although all major donors express concern about the prospect of the GOZ controlling most grain stocks as we enter the Parliamentary election cycle, at the same time, the lack of any credible data on the harvest and the GOZ's unwillingness to collaborate on even the simplest actions mean that the international community is unable at this time to mount or even plan for food assistance for the coming season. The UN, for its part, intends to express strong public disappointment at the GOZ decision. The recently concluded vulnerability assessment may reveal some useful information to enable initial planning, but a number of observers and analysts have questioned the quality of the data - apparently due to inadequate training of the surveyors. For the immediate future, donors will have to take a wait and see position on food assistance. We are working closely with other donors to examine options to do a comprehensive assessment or to pull together crop assessments that some NGOs conducted recently in the districts in which they work. End Comment  
SULLIVAN